

The altitude of a migrating Shoveler

by Jeffery Harrison

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On 3rd October, 1968 a bird strike occurred with a Transglobe Airways Britannia aircraft, while flying at 13,000 feet on a journey from Bombay to Bangkok. Parts of the bird were subsequently recovered from the engine and were sent from the Board of Trade (Civil Aviation) to the Infestation Control Laboratory of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for identification. From parts of one wing, Mr. C. A. Swan was able to identify the bird as a duck and sent the pieces to me for further examination. Part of the speculum, all the tertials and some wing-coverts were comparatively clean and unburnt and from these it was possible to make a definite identification of the bird as a Shoveler, *Anas clypeata* Linnaeus. It was a female and the tertials were typical of an adult with their rounded tips, broadly edged with pale buff, while the blue wing-coverts lacked any of the buffish margins of the juvenile's plumage.

Unfortunately by the time the remains reached me, Transglobe Airways had gone into liquidation, so that the exact spot where the bird strike occurred is not known, but it is reasonable to presume that the bird was on migration to its winter quarters, which include the whole of the Indian sub-continent and Siam (Thailand).

Both Lack (1960) and Eastwood (1967) have discussed the height of bird migration in the light of recent radar studies. Basically it is unusual for migrants to occur much above 10,000 feet and the majority appear to fly below 5,000 feet. However, there are a few records at over 20,000 feet. Positive identifications are not possible by radar, except into broad categories such as passerines, waders, etc. Ducks do not appear to be particularly prone to high flying according to Dr. G. V. T. Matthews, so this record of the Shoveler is of considerable interest. Bergman and Donner (1964) have shown that the Common Scoter and Long-tailed Duck fly at higher altitudes over the land part of their migratory routes than over the sea, overland altitudes of up to 5,000 feet being recorded, averaging 3,400 feet.

I am grateful to Mr. C. A. Swan for bringing this interesting record to my notice, to the Board of Trade for permission to publish it and to Dr. G. V. T. Matthews for his expert help in this field.

References:

- Bergman, G. and Donner, K. O. 1964. An analysis of the spring migration of the Common Scoter and Long-tailed Duck in Southern Finland. *Acta Zool. Fenn.*, 105: 5-39.
Eastwood, Eric 1967. *Radar Ornithology*, London.
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Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria* (Bechstein) at Lake Chad

by R. J. Dowsett

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At about 07.00 hrs on 17th October, 1968, I saw a large grey, heavy-billed *Sylvia*-type warbler in a *Salvadora persica* bush at Malam'fatori on the Nigerian shore of Lake Chad (13° 37' N., 13° 20' E.). Realising that it was either a Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria* or an Olive-tree Warbler *Hippolais olivetorum*

(Strickland), neither known from West Africa, I chased it into a nearby mist-net. In the hand it was clearly a first-year *S. nisoria*, and the specimen is now in the Zoology Museum of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

The bird was a male, with traces of body fat. It weighed 21.3 gms. at 07.30 hrs.; Williamson (1964, *Identification for Ringers*, 3: The Genus *Sylvia*. Brit. Trust Orn.) gives weights of 50 first-year autumn passage migrants in Scotland ranging from 18.8 to 31.0 gms., most between 20 and 25 gms. It had wing and bill lengths of 87 and 17.5 mm. respectively. Apart from primary 3 (ascending numbering) in the left wing being only two-thirds grown—presumably through an accident—the bird was in worn plumage with no trace of body moult.

This bird occurred at Malam'fatori after six days of exceptionally strong north-easterly winds, which abated only slightly during the afternoons and which might have blown the bird off course. *S. nisoria* migrates south-eastwards in autumn, from Europe to winter in south Arabia and north-east Africa (Williamson, *op. cit.*). The only records from north Africa are two specimens from Bahig, Egypt (55 kms. west-south-west of Alexandria)—one a very light, though "moderately fat", spring bird of 13.0 gms. (Hubbard and Seymour, 1968, *Ibis*: 576). South of the Sahara it is apparently unknown west of the Nile at about 12° N., 33° E. (Cave and MacDonald, 1954, *Birds of the Sudan*). It is unrecorded from north Africa west of Egypt, and south of the Sahara is apparently hitherto unrecorded west of the Sudan (Moreau, 1961, *Ibis*: 416, 588). However, birds from western breeding populations and those that occur regularly on passage in western Europe may well occur regularly as far west as Lake Chad. The occurrence of several east Africa-wintering species at Malam'fatori in autumn 1968—for example Greater Sandplover *Charadrius leschenaultii* Lesson, Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus* (Pontopp.) and Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* (Güld.)—lends support to this idea.

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Greater Sandplovers *Charadrius leschenaultii* Lesson at Lake Chad

by R. J. Dowsett

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On 2nd August, 1968, I shot a Greater Sandplover *Charadrius leschenaultii* on a sand beach on the Nigerian shore of Lake Chad at Malam'fatori (13° 37' N., 13° 20' E.). In the field it was a sandy coloured "sandplover", with a heavy dark bill, standing head and shoulders over associated Kittlitz's Sandplovers *C. pecuarius* Temminck and White-fronted Sandplovers *C. marginatus* Vieillot. It was extremely wild and I was unable to confirm in the field that it was *leschenaultii* rather than the similar Mongolian Sandplover *C. mongolus* Wagler. C. W. Benson of the University Museum, Department of Zoology, Cambridge and P. R. Colston of the Bird Room, British Museum (Natural History) compared the skin to series of *leschenaultii*, *mongolus* and the Caspian Plover